

Old Age and Death 413



Fig. 64. Tepoztecos worry about facing a dependent old age.

The situation of the aged varies considerably from family to family. The ownership of property, particularly of the kind which can be rented out and which produces an income with little or no work, is the best assurance for a secure old age. It is for this reason that parents generally do not divide their property among the children until after death. Delayed inheritance also gives them continued control over their children; if a married son lives with his parents well into their old age they are indeed fortunate, for he works the land, and the daughter-in-law does most of the work of the household. But most old people own only their house and *finca*, with perhaps a few fruit trees and a pig, and can be self-supporting only by hiring themselves out to others, or by carrying on a business.

A large proportion of old women, especially widows, support themselves by washing and ironing clothes, by selling tortillas, by raising a few pigs and chickens for sale, by buying small amounts of fruit and garden produce to sell in other villages, or as midwives and *curanderas*. There are fewer non-strenuous, gainful activities for old men, particularly for those who have learned no skill other than farming. Those who have no children or relatives to whom they can turn for regular or occasional aid are in a difficult position. Occasionally an aged person finds it necessary to support not only himself but an orphaned grandchild or a disabled, unmarried son or daughter. But the majority of Tepoztecan old people are at least partially aided by a son or daughter, a nephew, or grandchild. Cases of neglect, indifference, and even cruelty occur, but are few.

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